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AUTHOR Gonzalez, Gerardo M.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews alcohol awareness and alcoholism prevention efforts on college campuses since the mid-1970s. The concept of responsible drinking which is an accepted part of these college prevention programs is discussed. It is noted that while the responsible drinking concept has been recently called into question, there never was any meaningful body of research underlying its use in prevention programs in general, nor has there been any significant research to assess the efficacy of its use in campus prevention programs. Designated driver programs are also discussed, and it is noted that here again there has been no research evaluating these programs. Other points made are that college prevention and education programs created under the Omnibus Drug Bills of 1986 and 1988 are being rapidly created in an atmosphere of an inadequate research base. It is noted that many of the research funds provided to the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration have been specifically designated for "high risk youth" and do not include college students. At the same time, colleges have a rich array of resources which can be involved in meaningful research efforts if provided with proper leadership. The paper concludes by recommending a meaningful national research agenda regarding the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems on campus. (ABL)

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Are We Too Busy Doing What Needs To Be Done To Know What It Is That We're Doing? The Rationale and Purpose for a National Research Agenda on the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems on Campus

By

Gerardo M. Gonzalez, Ph. D.

Professor of Education

University of Florida

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Gerardo M. Gonzalez

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Thank you Vonnie. And thanks to each of you for taking the time out of your very busy schedules to be with us at this important meeting. I honestly believe that our deliberations over the next day and a half can be one of the most significant and potentially valuable events in the advancement of efforts to prevent alcohol and other drug-related problems on the college campus.

I am sure that all of you probably have heard the stereotype about Hispanics speaking too fast. Well, I am here to tell you that it is true. Sometimes I speak so fast that I can't even understand myself. And sometimes I speak so fast that I can't stop. Mindful of this tendency, and being well aware of the amount of time alloted for my part in this morning's program, I decided to prepare some written comments. I hope you'll bear with me.

As most of you know, I was the founder of an organization called BACCHUS. The acronym stands for Boost Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students. For over ten years beginning during my graduate training days at the University of Florida, I managed and developed this organization as its President and CEO. Today, almost three years since I left this post, BACCHUS remains the largest collegiate student organization concerned with the prevention of alcohol problems.

BACCHUS really had its genesis in the University 50 + 12 Conference sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) on the campus of Notre Dame in 1975. Motivated by this effort, BACCHUS came into being and adopted the philosophy of "responsible drinking" that was created and actively promoted by NIAAA at that time. With the full support of NIAAA and its National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information, BACCHUS went about making this concept an integral and accepted part of college prevention programs. We were so successful in this endeavor that even to this day the concept responsible drinking remains the dominant theme in most college alcohol education programs.

Now, however, the same agency that helped create and promote the concept responsible drinking is telling us that it is flawed. That its use in alcohol education should be abandoned. Some of the major criticisms being put forth against this concept include that it is operetionally undefinable; that it does not acknowledge that <u>any</u> drinking carries some degree of risk; that it in effect "blames the victim" in cases of alcohol dependence and alcoholism; and that there is no such thing as responsible drinking for young people under the legal drinking age. Just as a convincing case was made in the mid 1970's about why responsible drinking should be adopted as a basic socio-cultural standard of

prevention, an equally convincing case is made today as to why its use is potentially detrimental to prevention efforts. But, as far as its use on the college campus goes, the fact of the matter is that it is all conjecture. There was never any meaningful body of research underlying the use of the concept responsible drinking in prevention programs. And there has never been any significant research to assess the efficacy of its use in campus prevention programs. What little research evidence there is regarding responsible drinking programs on the college campus is inconclusive. Some research shows that educational programs based on this concept can be effective, and some research shows that they are not.

I raise this issue not to encourage debate about the merits of the concept responsible drinking, but rather to emphasize some of the inherent dangers of embarking on a major national prevention campaign in the absence of meaningful research. Another program that is rapidly growing in popularity on our nation's campuses is the so called designated driver program. As I'm sure you're all aware, this program encourages one person in a group to remain sober so that others may drink, presumably to the point of intoxication, and be driven home safely. To my knowledge, the contribution of this program to highway safety has never been measured. Nor is there any research focused on whether this program encourages

drunkenness as an accepted activity and therefore actually increases alcohol-related problems. But as I mentioned, the designated drivers program is alive and well on our nation's campuses.

The way in which alcohol and other drug prevention programs are proliferating in institutions of higher education is through a process I call heresay. One person or institution hears about a program being conducted at another instituion and proceeds to implement a similar program. Those of us involved in research know about the problems of generalizability of programs or research results accross instutitons or populations. But this information is not often heeded by the highly motivated practitioner eager for ideas on "what works" in the prevention of alcohol or other drug problems. And sometimes this information is simply not available to them. Unfortunately, there are no theoretical models or major program of research to guide the development of specifically targeted campus prevention programs. Thus, programs continue to develop on the basis of heresay.

It is ironic that institutions of higher education, whose primary mision in society is the generation and imparting of new knowledge, continue to address one of the most serious social and health threats facing the Academy in the absence of research. The Omnibus Drug Bills of

1986 and 1988 provided millions of dollars to the U. S. Department of Education and mandated that a substantial part of this money be spend to fund programs of prevention and education for college students. Hundreds of colleges and universities accross America have received funds under these laws and are actively involved in program development efforts. However, because of the perceived urgency of the problem and legislative intent forbidding the use of these funds for research, programs are being rapidly created in an atmosphere characterized by a woefully inadequate research base. It is almost as if we're saying that we're too busy doing what needs to be done to know what it is that we're doing.

In fact, while there is a rapid proliferation of campus-based education and prevention programs, to my knowledge there is not a single Federally sponsored research project, either in the Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, specifically targeted on the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems within instituions of higher education. Much of the research dollars provided to the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA)-- which is the HHS agency responsible for research in these areas -- have been specifically designated for "high risk youth," the definition of which does not include college students. It seems like we've forgotten that the spread of illicit

drug use into middle class America began just a short decade or two ago on the college campus. As college students of the 60's and 70's, baby boomers as they are called, moved into positions of leadership in our society many carried with them their hang loose ethic and their drugs. Soon enough these leaders set a trend which made illicit drug use acceptable in America, and whose aftermath we're now dealing with. Although I do not have the hard data to substantiate it, doesn't it make sense that if previous generations of college students can have such a negative impact in American society in terms of acceptability of illicit drugs, then they could also have an equally positive impact if their minds were made up to do so? And doesn't it make sense that a meaningful prevention effort must take a look at the broader picture rather than narrowly focus only on those who may be at risk of dependence? As Dr. Frederick Goodwin, the Administrator of ADAMHA, recently said at the National Collegiate Drug Awareness Week conference "the loss of a mind to drugs is always tragic, but the loss of a college student's mind to drugs is doubly tragic because of the lost potential." The lack of attention to college students in the national alcohol and other drugs research agenda is indeed tragic.

The college campus encompasses a rich array of resources, including

highly capable and motivated students, faculty and staff, who can be mobilized and involved in meaningful research efforts if provided with the proper leadership. Providing this leadership is the task we begin here today. The stated goals of the Network of Colleges and Universities Committed to the Elimination of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, which were sent to you and which form the basis for this meeting today, give considerable prominence to the role of research in this initiative. This meeting therefore represents the first step toward what we hope will be full implementation of the applied research mission embodied in the Network goals. The colleges have been asked to join the war on drugs. But what General would send his troops to battle without some assessment of the enemy's capability, knowledge of his weapons' effectiveness, and some intelligence gathering mechanism? In my view, you here represent the field marshals who can make the research happen.

This would not be the first time that the educational enterprise in this country has been asked to join the war on drugs. Back in the early and mid 70's major efforts were made to address the problems of alcohol and other drug use through educational strategies. Reviews of the empirical evaluation research literature on the effects of these early alcohol and drug education programs reached a remarkable degree of concensus

regarding their lack of effects on behavior. However, in a recent critical review of this research, Braucht and Braucht concluded that "pervasive methodological flaws in these evaluation studies make any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of alcohol and drug education strategies more a matter of reliance on faith than on credible empirical evidence."

Thus, our purpose here is no less than to begin laying the foundation for a meaningful national research agenda regarding the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems on campus. Our nation can not afford to continue the massive expenditure of funds and resources in the conduct of prevention programs without a viable knowledge base. At the very least, we ought to be able to look back five or ten years from now and say that we learned something from this effort, and we're better able to deal with alcohol and other drug problems because of it. Otherwise, not only would the war on drugs have been lost, but worse, we would have learned nothing from it.

Once again, thanks for being here. All of us in the Network look foward to working with you. And we all look foward to a very exciting and productive meeting.